

**Cabinet for Health Services**  
**STATEWIDE NEWS RELEASE**  
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## **HOLIDAY COOKING TIPS**

**FRANKFORT, Ky. (Nov. 24, 2003)** -- The holiday season is near and presents a number of food safety challenges for those preparing, storing, handling, transporting and serving foods.

While Americans enjoy a safe food system, each year some Kentucky families experience illness from their holiday meal, especially persons at the highest risk of being affected by foodborne illness - the elderly, children, and individuals with weakened immune systems, including pregnant women.

Food is a common feature for most American holiday celebrations and the Cabinet for Health Services' Food Safety Branch is providing food safety tips to assure safe holiday meals. They are:

**Clean:** Wash hands and food-contact surfaces often. Bacteria can spread throughout the kitchen and get onto cutting boards, knives, sponges, and counter tops.

**Separate:** Don't cross-contaminate-don't let bacteria spread from one food product to another. This is especially true for raw meat, poultry and seafood. Keep these foods and their juices away from ready-to-eat foods.

**Cook:** Cook to proper temperatures. Foods are properly cooked when they are heated for a long enough time and at a high enough temperature to kill the harmful bacteria that cause foodborne illness.

**Chill:** Refrigerate promptly. Refrigerate foods quickly because cold temperatures keep most harmful bacteria from growing and multiplying. Refrigerators should be set at 40 degrees F and the freezer at 0 degrees F, and the accuracy of the settings should be checked occasionally with a thermometer. Pot-luck dishes are common during the holiday season and care should be taken to ensure that foods are transported and held to assure cold foods remain cold and cooked foods remain hot.

**Baked goods:** FDA advises consumers not to eat uncooked cookie dough, homemade or commercial, or batters made with raw fresh eggs because raw fresh eggs may contain bacteria that can cause an intestinal infection called salmonellosis. Thorough cooking kills the bacteria that cause the infection.

**Egg Nog:** Traditional eggnog made with raw eggs also presents the same risk to consumers -- salmonellosis. While cooking can destroy the disease-causing bacteria, consumers can still become ill when the eggnog is left at room temperature for several hours before being consumed. Safe alternatives are pasteurized eggnog beverages sold in grocery dairy cases; these products should also be kept refrigerated.

**Apple cider and other juices:** Apple cider is often served during the holiday season. Most apple cider and juices are pasteurized or otherwise treated to destroy harmful bacteria. Treated juice is shelf-stable. Unpasteurized cider or juice must have this warning on the label:

**WARNING:** This product has not been pasteurized and therefore, may contain harmful bacteria that can cause serious illness in children, the elderly, and persons with weakened immune systems.

**Turkey:** Thawing the turkey completely before cooking is necessary to reduce the risk of foodborne illness. If a turkey is not properly thawed, the outside of the turkey will be done before

the inside, and the inside will not be hot enough to destroy disease-causing bacteria. Allow the correct amount of time to properly thaw and cook a whole turkey. For example, a 20-pound turkey needs two to three days to thaw completely when thawed in the refrigerator at a temperature of no more than 40 degrees F. A stuffed turkey needs 4  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 5  $\frac{1}{4}$  hours to cook completely.

To check a stuffed turkey to see if it is fully cooked, insert a food thermometer into the inner thigh area near the breast of the turkey but not touching bone. The turkey is fully cooked when the internal temperature reaches 180 degrees F. and the stuffing reaches 165 degrees F. The turkey should be held at 140 degrees F. until served.

All raw fruits and vegetables must be thoroughly washed prior to preparation and serving. Unclean hands are often the sources of food contamination - wash hands often and thoroughly.

Leftover turkey and stuffing should be stored separately in shallow dishes or platters. To reheat turkey or serve in a hot dish, rapidly heat to an internal temperature of 165 degrees F., assuring it is heated thoroughly.

**Oysters and Seafood:** Be sure to cook oysters thoroughly at home or have them cooked thoroughly when eating out. Buy only fresh seafood that is refrigerated or properly iced. Always cook fish thoroughly. Cooking fish until it is opaque and flaky helps destroy any bacteria that may be present. People with liver disorders or weakened immune systems are especially at risk for becoming ill and should avoid eating raw oysters or shellfish.

**Mail order food gifts:** Care should be taken with mail-order food gifts which can include meat, poultry, fish and other perishables like cheese, fruit, and cheesecake. The gift giver should alert the recipient to the pending arrival of the food gift; the recipient should open the package immediately to make sure that, foods requiring refrigeration arrives in a chilled state.

Additional food safety information for consumers is available through the Foods Safety Branch at 502/564-7181 or your local health department.